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**STATE ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TO REPAIR AND PRESERVE
THE HISTORIC SCHOONER ERNESTINA IN NEW BEDFORD**

Massachusetts Environmental Affairs Secretary Stephen R. Pritchard, State Senator Mark C. Montigny, State Representative Antonio F.D. Cabral, and Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) State Parks Director Priscilla Geigis, gathered at the New Bedford State Pier today to announce and celebrate a public/private partnership that will bring capital improvements to the *Schooner Ernestina*, the official vessel of the Commonwealth and a National Historic Landmark. The Secretary also announced a new *Schooner Ernestina* Partnership Initiative established with the goal of preserving the historic schooner and allowing it to continue its mission of providing environmental and maritime history education for generations to come.

The Commonwealth has provided more than \$2.5 million in capital and operational funds for the schooner since it was accepted as a gift from the people of Cape Verde in 1982. Last year, however, DCR suspended the *Ernestina*'s sailing program and prepared the boat for dockside programs and offered waterfront tours, issuing a call for partners to help support the schooner financially so that she might sail again.

Secretary Pritchard acknowledged Robert Hildreth and the Hildreth Stewart Charitable Foundation, who generously donated \$80,000 to help the 112-year old Essex-built *Schooner Ernestina* return to the sea. This was matched by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' (EOEA) Office of Public Private Partnerships (OPPP) for a total \$160,000 to fund the third phase of the keel restoration work needed in order for the U.S. Coast Guard to declare the vessel once again seaworthy.

"Today marks a new chapter in the proud history of the Ernestina as the Commonwealth works to ensure the continuation of the schooner's preservation and ambitious educational mission through a partnership model," said Pritchard. "I am thankful for Mr. Hildreth's donation and I look forward to working with the Ernestina Commission to ensure our mission continues."

Senator Mark Montigny, who has successfully secured over \$1,000,000 dollars in state funding for the *Ernestina* during his tenure, said "I would like to thank Bob Hildreth for his support today shown by his generous contribution to the Ernestina. The Schooner Ernestina's

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Kerry Healey
Lt. Governor

Stephen R. Pritchard, Secretary
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Stephen H. Burrington, Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

connection to New Bedford and the Commonwealth is a historic and valuable one. We have an urgent responsibility to protect and preserve this vessel.”

“Mr. Robert Hildreth's generous donation to the Schooner Ernestina Commission provides an opportunity to rejuvenate the Commission and bring the interested parties together to ensure that the Ernestina remain a catalyst for tourism and education,” said Representative Cabral.

During the event the Secretary and DCR announced they will be seeking a new Executive Director for the schooner as well as soliciting nomination of individuals who may wish to serve on the Ernestina Commission to assist in the oversight of the historic schooner. Nominations for Commission members should be made to: Lynne Worrell-McCray at the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, 251 Causeway St., Suite 600, Boston, MA 02114.

“Although partners continue to be involved with the *Ernestina*, more partners are needed in order to continue to provide unique educational sailing program for which the schooner is known. I encourage all interested parties to contact DCR to learn more about the Commission,” added DCR Director of State Parks and Recreation Priscilla Geigis.

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